

FRANK CLAUDE TAYLOR

War broke out in Europe in late July 1914; somewhat inappropriately named by some as the Great War. For most of this War the allied generals fought with outdated tactics. Not at all suitable for improved weapons such as the machine-gun that could fire up to 600 rounds per minute.

The first major battle, Ypres in November 1914, provided an early example of what the new firepower could do. British casualties – mostly from machine-gun fire – were about 50,000 men: about one third of the total British Expeditionary Force in France.

Of the 150,000 men the BEF sent to France 90% were to become casualties.

Kitchener, having been appointed Secretary of State for War in August 1914, immediately realised that hundreds of thousands more soldiers were required. He called for a new volunteer army of 100,000 men, then another, and another, and so on. By early 1916 he had raised six new armies totalling 600,000 men.

To raise still more men, in January 1916 the British Government introduced conscription. Casualties had been heavy on both sides and the War was at a stalemate.

This is the background to the conflict joined by Frank Taylor on 3rd February 1916 – then a 28 year-old bricklayer.

Frank was not yet a farmer; he was a skilled and much respected bricklayer.

Frank was born in Charsfield.

Whilst living at Poplar Farm Clopton, son of George and Alice Taylor, Frank would go to Canada with his brother Fred and Robert William Mouser for the bricklaying season.

The fare was £11 and the workers were required to have £5 in their pocket when landing. Frank had only £4 10 shillings but thought "that will do" - but no - so he was 'jailed' until the family could send over the amount needed to make up this sum.

The boat to Canada was from Liverpool to Quebec, and upon landing they had to face a three-day train journey, on hard wooden benches, to Winnipeg.

Frank plied his bricklaying trade in Canada, probably, for three summers. It was hard work but well paid - pay coming at the end of the contract. The lads always came home via New York, ensuring that they had somewhere to let off steam with some of their 'newly won' cash.

So, with Frank's love of Canada, in February 1916 he joined up with a Canadian Regiment - the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Having passed his medical on 29th February 1916 Frank was approved, on 2nd March 1916 by his Officer Commanding, and enlisted with his Regimental Number of 1847.

Frank was not a fresh-faced youth and would prove to be a brave soldier who, albeit inexperienced, was able to apply his country crafts - learned as a young lad – and, coupled with, the obvious self sufficiency required when travelling abroad to bricklay, he settled into the forces and flourished in that environment. He was not to become cannon fodder.

The Canadian forces had a fine reputation. Troops from Canada played a key role in the Battle of the Somme, but at great cost. The 'Byng Boys' commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, followed the successful tank attack on Courcellette on 15th September 1916. It is generally recognised that in November the Canadians fought with astounding bravery to capture two key enemy trenches.

On the Somme over 24,000 Canadians were killed or wounded. They earned a reputation as the fiercest of Allied forces.

When joining up Frank was 5 feet 6 inches high, with a chest when expanded of 32½ inches (with a 2inch expansion), of medium fair complexion, grey eyes and dark brown hair. This might seem short in stature today, but in those days many were of that height.

He was of good sound physical stock – "Akenfield" mentions that many agricultural workers required feeding-up by the army during initial training and would make a marked physical improvement at the end of six-months. Not our Frank – he was already fit and well-nourished.

After the War Frank set up as an agricultural contractor, married Beattie Finbow of Little stonham, and lived at Brook Farm Charsfield.

His next move was to a cottage on the Wickham Market road at Charsfield.

Then, in 1927, Frank and Beattie purchased Ivy Lodge Farm Bredfield – the 100 acres, house and outbuildings cost £1,000.

Frank died on 19th May 1975 and was buried in Bredfield Churchyard.





Princess Patricia decorates the PPCLI Regimental Colour with a wreath of laurel on the Farewell parade Bramshott Camp, England 21 Feb. 1919

David Brown 2016